



Senate Bill 617

*Local School Systems - Equivalent Access Standards - Digital Tools
(Nonvisual Access Accountability Act for K-12 Education)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee

Date: February 16, 2022

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS SB 617 WITH AMENDMENTS**. While well-intentioned, this bill as drafted would place a costly mandate on school systems and county governments to carry out new state policy and provide all students with digital tools accessible for students with disabilities.

MACo recognizes the desire to create accommodations for all students and each county school board and leadership approaches these access issues with the proper gravity. However, SB 617 would substitute a one-size-fits-all state policy for that local judgment. Additionally, it would potentially place a costly mandate on school systems and county governments to carry out this new uniform state policy to provide all students with accessible digital tools regardless of whether the student is in need of this specialized tool.

The state funding for public schools is set via formula. Adding new cost components to the required school program belies the lengthy debates regarding these adequacy figures. Counties have no choice but to support these new costs—competing for limited local funds against school facilities, public safety, roadway maintenance, and the full range of other essential public services.

Local school jurisdictions currently provide reasonable accommodations, including accessible tools and resources in-line with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which sets nationwide standards. MACo requests an amendment so that counties may continue to follow the reasonable and flexible standards set by the ADA rather than the rigid standards as drafted in SB 617. Such an amendment would allow counties to continue serving students with disabilities in the most practicable manner best suited for the unique needs and abilities of each jurisdiction.

Local school systems work to meet the unique needs of each student through individualized services and develop responses to changing technology and learning factors accordingly. SB 617, as drafted, would upend this sensible policy. Accordingly, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** for SB 617.